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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships among parent psychological well-being, parents' perceptions of their children's social competence, and reported use of authoritative parenting strategies during the kindergarten year. Parents of 179 kindergarten children in a small Midwestern U.S. city who were also involved in a Head Start Transition Study were recruited for this study. All parent measures were collected in interviews conducted in the home. In the fall of the kindergarten year, parents were asked to assess their children's social skills using the Social Skills Rating Scale and to complete a global measure of the parents' self-esteem. A measure of authoritative parenting was completed the following spring. Preliminary analyses indicated that both parents' self-esteem and parents' ratings of their children's social competence in the fall of kindergarten were predictive of more authoritative parenting skills in spring, after accounting for the influence of poverty and parent educational level. (Author)

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Predictors of Authoritative Parenting in Kindergarten

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships among parent psychological well-being, parent's perceptions of their children's social competence, and reported use of authoritative parenting strategies during the kindergarten year. Parents of 179 kindergarten children in a small midwestern city were recruited to be in the study. All parent measures were collected in interviews conducted in the home. In the fall of the kindergarten year, parents were asked to assess their children's social skills using the Social Skills Rating Scale (Gresham & Elliot, 1990), and to complete a global measure of the parent's self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). A measure of authoritative parenting (Slater & Power, 1987) was completed the following spring. Preliminary analyses indicated that both parent's self-esteem and parents' ratings of their children's social competence in the fall of kindergarten are predictive of more authoritative parenting skills in spring, after accounting for the influence of poverty and parent education. Intervention programs that focus on parenting skills may be more effective by working on building parent self-esteem and parents' perceptions of their children's competence.

Prediction

Parent's self-esteem and parent's perceptions of their children's social skills in the fall of the kindergarten year are predictive of parental use of authoritative parenting skills in the spring, after considering the influence of poverty and parent education.

Previous Research Findings

- One common childrearing goal parents have is to foster optimal competence in their children (Baumrind, 1996). The authoritative model is characterized by parents who are warm and responsive, yet demanding of their children.
- Measures of global self-esteem are associated with psychological well-being and have an inverse relationship with depression (Rosenberg, 1885), where depression has more effect on self-esteem than the reverse (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989).
- Depression may influence parenting behaviors in a variety of ways that are not well understood because of methodological difficulties (Richters, 1992). Depression may interfere with warmth, consistency, communication, and parental perceptions.
- The social competence of the child may influence authoritative parenting (Bell, 1968). Parents who perceive their child to be more competent may be more likely to use more authoritative, rather than authoritarian, parenting strategies.
- Parental use of inductive discipline, as opposed to power-assertive discipline, is positively related to children's prosocial behavior (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996).

Therefore, previous literature leads us to examine how parental self-esteem and perceptions of children's social competence relate to authoritative parenting.

Method

Participants

179 parents and their kindergarten children in a small midwestern city who were also involved in a Head Start Transition Study.

Sample Characteristics:

50% Head Start, 50% non-Head Start families
53% incomes below 100% poverty guidelines
57% single parents
12% less than high school education
35% sad or depressed for at least 2 years
96% white

Recruitment

Families with Head Start experience were recruited by mail, with follow-up phone calls and door-to-door visits for families lacking telephones. Identical recruitment strategies were used to recruit non-Head Start families from the same neighborhoods. About 25% of the sample had no telephones.

Measures

Social Skills Rating Scale (Gresham & Elliot, 1990)

In the fall of kindergarten, parents were asked to assess their child's social skills. Parents responded to 30 3-point statements regarding the frequency (0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = very often) of their child's cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Mean item scores were used in all analyses. (Cronbach's alpha = .90)

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

In the fall of kindergarten, parents were asked to complete a self-report global measure of self-esteem. The Rosenberg consists of 10 statements with a four-point response format (1 = strongly agree; 4 = strongly disagree). (Reports of Cronbach's alpha range from .77 to .88)

Parenting Dimensions Inventory (Slater & Power, 1987)

In the spring of kindergarten, parents were asked to complete a measure of authoritative parenting that included parenting behaviors such as nurturance, responsiveness, consistency, and nonrestrictiveness. Parents responded to 26 statements using a scale from 1 (not at all descriptive of me) to 6 (highly descriptive of me). As a measure of authoritative parenting behavior, a mean item score for the entire 26 item scale was calculated; coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

Procedure

All parent measures were collected in interviews conducted in the home both in the fall and the spring of the child's kindergarten year. In order to minimize the problems with parent literacy, interviewers read all of the questions to the parent and recorded their answers.

Results

Means and standard deviations for all variables are included in Table 1. Correlations among the parenting and child variables are listed in Table 2. Hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 3) indicated that, after accounting for the influence of poverty and parent education ($R^2 = .13$), parent's self-esteem ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.8$, $p < .001$) accounted for an additional 7% of the variance ($F = 14.15$, $p < .001$) in authoritative parenting skills. In another series of hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 4), after accounting for the influence of poverty and parent education ($R^2 = .13$), parents' ratings of their children's social competence in the fall accounted for an additional 5% of the variance ($F = 11.23$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .23$, $t = 3.35$, $p < .01$) in their use of authoritative parenting skills in the spring.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Parenting and Child Variables (N = 179)

	Mean	S.D.
Parent Education	5.28	1.51
Parent Self-Esteem	3.20	.48
Children's Social Skills	1.23	.23
Parenting Behaviors	4.42	.57

Table 2

Correlations among Parenting Variables and Child Social Skills (N = 179)

	Parent education	Poverty	Parent self esteem	Children's social skills	Parenting Behaviors
Parent education		.28***	.19*	.16*	.33***
Poverty			.21**	.18*	.23**
Parent self esteem				.20**	.33***
Children's social skills					.30***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3

Effects of Poverty, Parent Education, and Parent Self-Esteem on Parenting Behavior (N = 179)

Variable	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.13***	
Poverty	.05	.03	.11		
Education	.10	.03	.25		
Step 2				.20***	.07
Self Esteem	.31	.08	.26		

Note: ***p < .001

Table 4

Effects of Poverty, Parent Education, and Parent Perceptions of Children's Social Skills on Parenting Behavior (N = 179)

Variable	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.13***	
Poverty	.06	.04	.12		
Education	.10	.03	.26		
Step 2				.18****	.05***
Children's Social Skills	.58	.17	.23		

Note: ***p < .001; ****p < .0001

Conclusions

- Previous studies have interpreted causal directions of influence from parent to child using data collected at one time. Our data, collected longitudinally, suggests that parent self esteem does influence the quality of parenting that they provide at a later time.

- When parent perceptions of their children's social skills are assessed at the same time that parent perceptions of parenting are assessed, it is unclear whether the direction of influence is from the parent to the child or from the child to the parent. Our longitudinal data suggests that parents' perceptions of their children's social skills does influence their later parenting behaviors.

- Our results suggest that parents' self-esteem and their perception of their children's social competence are predictive of more authoritative parenting.

- Intervention programs that focus on parenting skills may be more effective by working on building parent self-esteem and parents' perceptions of their children's competence.

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